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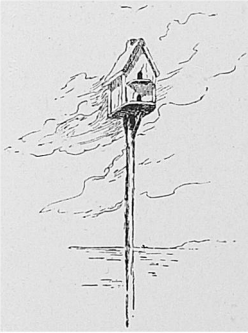
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A BIRD-HOUSE TOWN

BY BLANCHE DILLAYE

With original illustrations by the author.



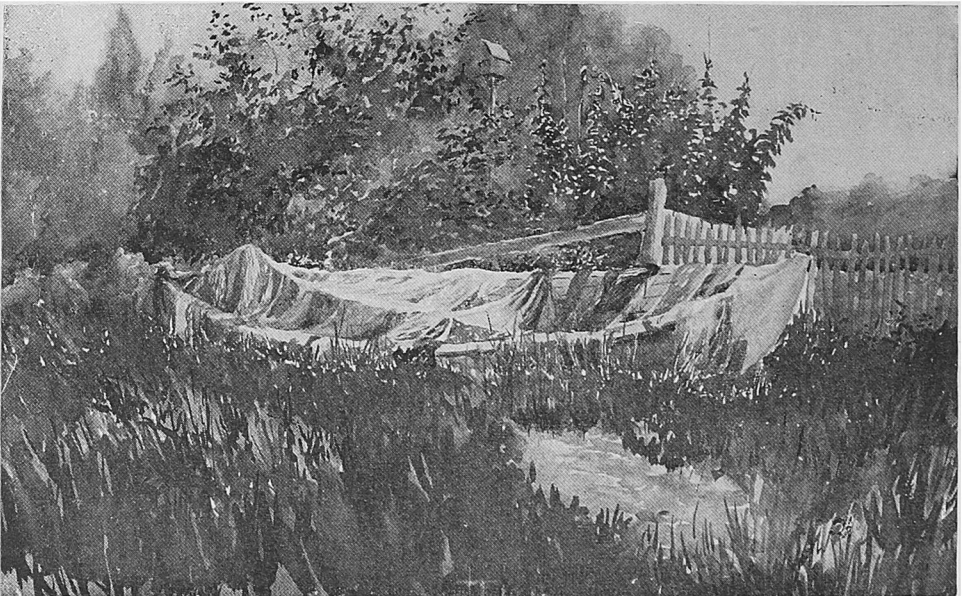
If the breeze had not dropped and the tide turned just at that moment we might never have found that strange little village! But there on the hill it stood, shining like a jewel, in its green setting, every visible window giving back a glittering response to the pent-up glory of the sinking sun, and calling to us of the brushes to come and paint.

A wheeling mass of birds was circling overhead, their shrill cries piercing the coming stillness, and in mid-air between them and the silent village, like a sentry in the sky, towered a bird-house on a pole.

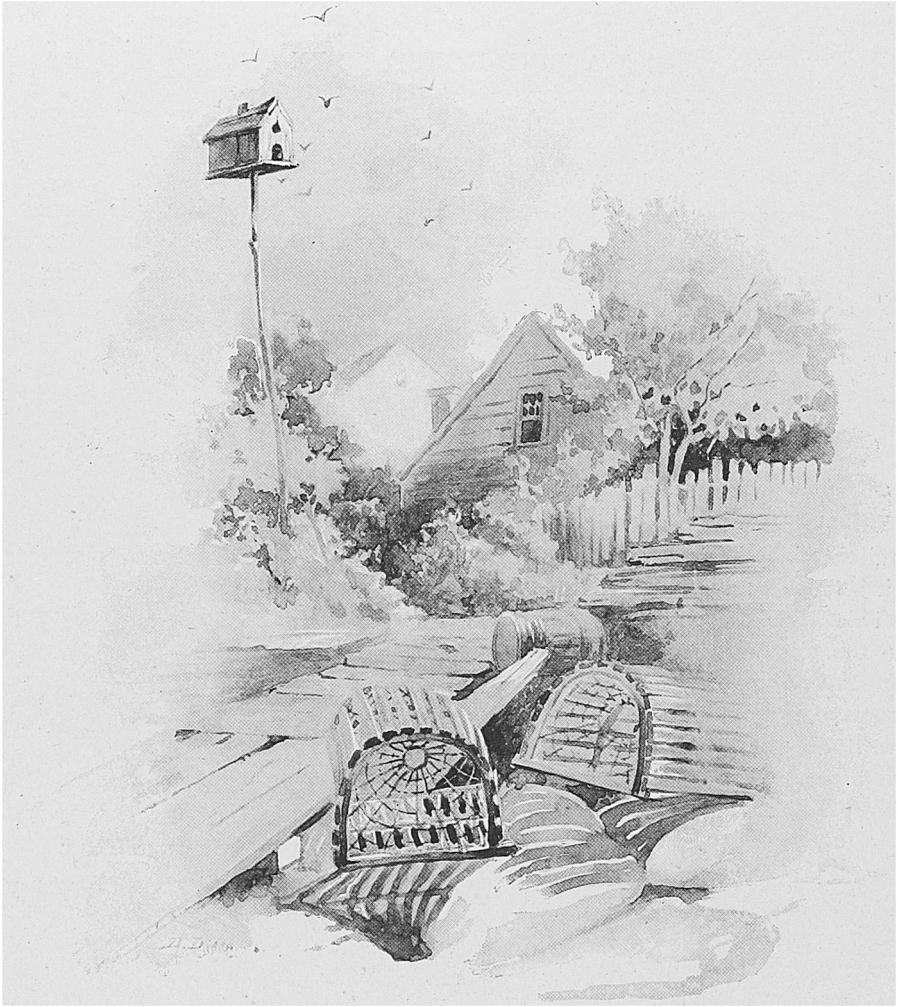
This little dwelling, of all those that melted into the undulating landscape, was the only one that showed signs of habitation. It stood high above the others, its weather-beaten face turned toward the sea, its hospitable door open to the winds of heaven, its rose-window watching the offing. Solitary, aloof, poetic, a spot of purple in the yellow light, the earth serene and quiet below



A BREEZY SITUATION



DRYING FISH-NETS IN THE GARDEN



THE OUT-POST AT THE LANDING

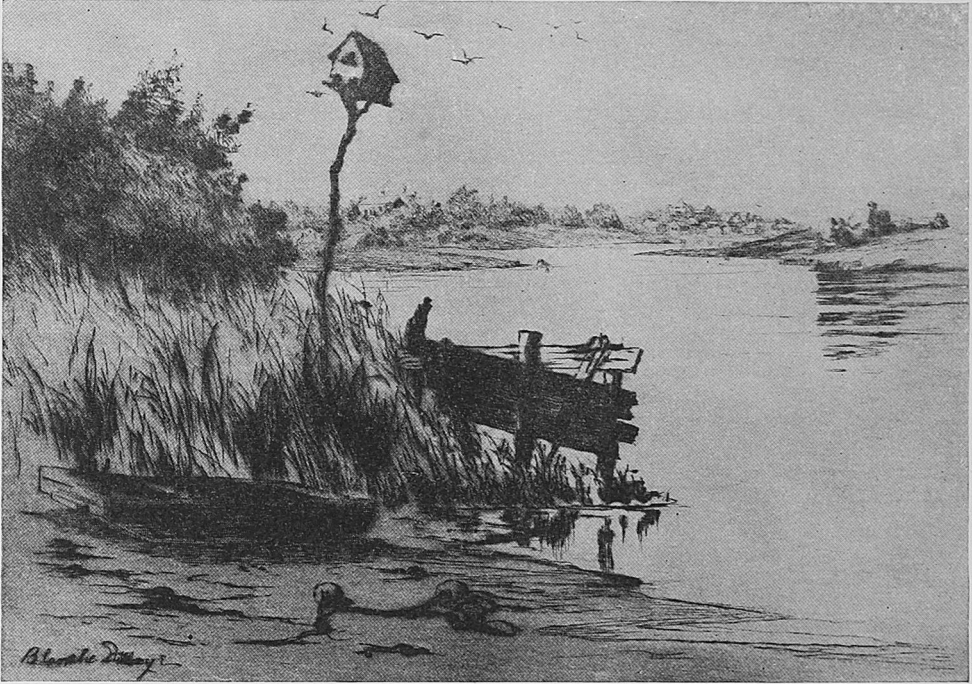
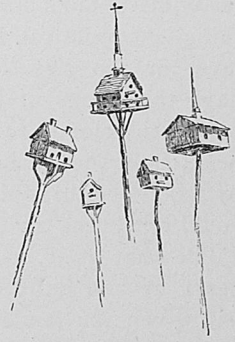
it, the birds sweeping in flowing curves above it, a motive at our hands. We came to anchor at its feet, opened our paint-boxes, and never closed them again for many days.

The village, of which this little house was the outpost, was on the road to nowhere in particular, lost among protecting hills, and undiscovered as yet by the writer, the painter, or the pedler—a new field accessible only from the side of the sea, but well hidden by the wrinkled shore. It dwelt in the stillness of country air, embalmed in the odor of the flowers that ran riot over its garden-walls in a mass of maddening color and hemmed in on all sides by a velvety wealth of foliage. There hung about it that aroma of beauty and individuality which, the whole earth over, draws the artist like a magnet. The weeds had their way by the roadside, fringing it with a wanton prodigality of bloom and color that cried out for an immortalizing brush; and the green tendrils that wrapped the fence-rails round and round waved their banners in assured possession and beautifying glory. All this time the village

coquetted like a shy beauty with the hill-country, hiding in a hollow, peeping over a gentle rise, disappearing behind a curve, glancing from a bosky enclosure, ever leading us on and on to new glimpses, new enchantments, new beauties.

But over and above all this there was a quaint particular charm about the place. Its rare beauty was everywhere punctuated by a pretty petty thing set high in air—a tiny mansion in the sky, the home of the first bird that saw the sign “to let” and chose to pay the requisite rent of songs and gentle chirpings.

This was the ruling spirit of the spot. Along the wayside,



A WATERSIDE BIRD-VILLA

in the gardens, by the water's edge, perched on barns, overtopping outhouses, built in with trellises, hidden among orchard trees, always and ever repeating itself on its slender stem was the whimsical, the unnecessary, the lofty bird-house.

I have said that there was no industry here, but I have forgotten the builder of bird-houses. Who the chief architect was I know not, but in monuments of his skill he lived on every side. Was it the architectural prettiness of these diminutive structures that had first prompted the conceit, or had he failed in the construction of larger edifices and turned to these as a safety-valve for



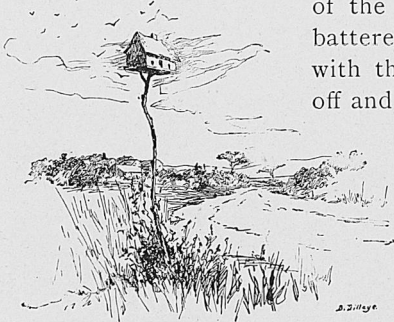
THE VILLAGE MILL

his unmarketable ideas? Perhaps it was something less practical, more æsthetic, just a simple love for the picturesque, a poetic longing to have the things of heaven within reach to depeople the clouds, to capture the vagrant winged beauties of the air and tether them near at hand by a bond so invisible, yet compelling, that they could not guess their own.

Be that as it may, he had been an artist at heart, he had builded better than he knew, he had given the landscape-painter a new subject, a new sketching-ground, a city original, fanciful, dainty, unique, swimming in ether—the Venice

of the air—soon old, battered and bruised, with the paint washed

off and the beauty washed on in broad sweeps of time's telling brush; and turn where you might, these little homes demanded acknowledgment. You found them in your foreground unexpectedly, and before you were aware they had possessed themselves of your canvas and run away with your hand. If you thought to escape them they peered out from some unexpected quarter and defied your resistance.



A FAR OUTLOOK

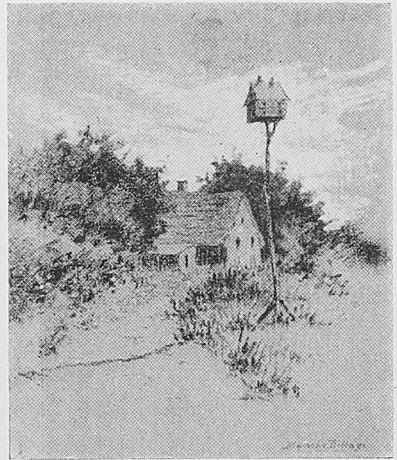
You never wanted to resist, for the days were not long enough to express half the charm that hovered like a mystic spirit about these castles in the air.

The village seemed to have no reason for existence beyond that of giving birth to some man of genius who turned his back on it as soon as the down was on his lip, and left the oaks at his father's gate to grow old, gnarled and twisted, looking down its single street for his home-coming, unless it was that of delighting the painter.

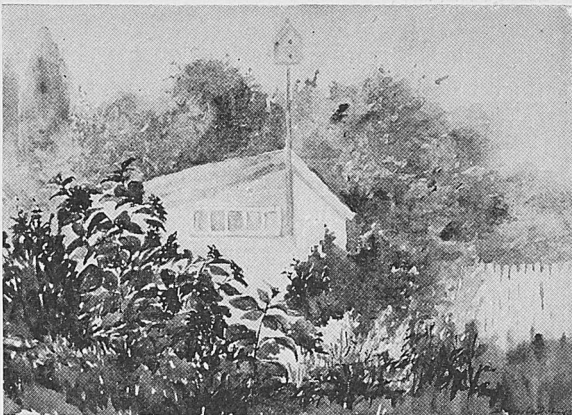
It was in the world's mind—if the world gave it a thought—a place to escape from, to circumvent, to avoid. All the turning wheels of the world's ambition

went on on the other side of the rampart of trees, by the dusty high-road that dipped and rose and lost itself on its way to the heart of civilization, but for the artist it had a charm which artists alone can know.

The yacht lay fretting in the bay, flapping sails, grating chains, creaking ropes; but our ears were closed and our eyes opened, and we knew nothing of the murmurings. Let no one count on time, who paints!



A ROADSIDE LODGE



THE GUARDIAN OF THE POULTRY-HOUSE